

# THEY CALL US BRIDEZILLAS

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They Call Us is a literary magazine created by powerful women and gender minorities wanting to empower other women and gender minorities. Using media, art, and literature as a means to inspire, They Call Us wants to tell the everyday struggles of women and gender minorities from around the world.

The purpose of art is to create change, so They Call Us works to unite artists to tell the stories of those that are normally silenced. Our goal is to ignite conversation and encourage people of all ages, races, sexualities, genders, nationalities, abilities, and the like to share their stories. They Call Us wishes to diversify the messages we see online and change the dialogue to give credibility to all of us who have felt helpless and lacking a credible voice.

## A NOTE TO OUR READERS

This magazine centers around themes of:

*Profanity*

*Mentions of rape*

If any of the above are sensitive topics for you, please pay attention to the trigger warnings listed before relevant pieces.

They Call Us seeks to tell the stories of any and all who wish to share them. Sometimes these stories, while important to listen to, can be hard to hear. Above all else, please take care of yourself.

Thank you for reading.

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# FOREWARD

By Meg Harris

*Content warning: profanity*

We have gathered here today to figure out what the fuck is going on.

Weddings have transformed over the last few centuries - evolving in their meaning, message, and purpose. This edition seeks to explain the complex history of weddings and how brides see them today.

The legalization of gay marriage changed not only the culture around marriage but how we define it. In 2005 when Spain legalized gay marriage the government altered the language of the law to redefine marriage; Where it was formally, "A union between a man and a woman with certain determined rituals or formal legalities," it is now a "solemn act between two same-sex or different-sex persons, who decide to establish a union." As other countries caught up with Spain, the legal definition of weddings changed around the world! If one act can remake the law globally, what can centuries do to how we view weddings and their traditions?

Weddings began as a way for families to create bonds with new families to gain clout, money, land, power, etc. Males served their families by protecting the lands. Females of the family, to quote Mulan "can serve their families in one way, by striking a good match" and producing an heir. Let me be clear, by "families" I mean MEN. While the family and women may benefit from the union, it was the men who would typically select, organize, and approve the terms with or without the bride's permission.

Due to this exchange, weddings were seen like a business deal and dresses were an important part of negotiation. Before the time of paternity tests, the only way for a man be 100000% sure that a baby was theirs was if the bride was a virgin. In many western cultures, the white-ness of the dress signified that purity. This may seem sexist and controlling, that's because it totally was, but it was not for nothing. As Henry VIII and Mary Queen of Scots can tell you, blood lines and ANY doubt about birth could bring down empires.

The whole idea of marrying for love did not come into play until the late 1800s and early 1900s when the enlightenment idea of "pursuing happiness" entered wedding culture. This shift is due in part to the French and American revolution. Those wars were not just about forms of government, they were built around a society where birth did not necessarily determine your station. So, how did love change the game?

Unfortunately, the emphasis on purity for women (exclusively) did not change much. They were still expected to "save themselves" and wear white. Another factor that remained was the father passing responsibility from themselves to the husband, more commonly known as "walking down the aisle."

Artwork titled "Eternal Love"  
by Sandra Snobar



It was not until very recently, the 1940s, when (white) women began to enter the workforce in droves where their lives did not center around marriage. We had **OPTIONS** in life. Work. Travel. Marry. It was (somewhat) up to us. In modern times most of the population has a wedding (or a few) and many see these once controlling wedding traditions as beautiful moments of unity. In a way, weddings have gone through the greatest "rebranding" in history.

So, with our choices more bountiful than ever, how do women see weddings today? What place do weddings have? And in such modern times, why, just for knowing what we want on our big day, do They Call Us Bridezillas?

# WEDDING PLANNER BLUES

By J. McNeely-Kirwan

Wrongly bouqueted,  
I snarl over roses  
Instead of orchids,  
Over baby's breath  
Meant to be sage,  
And ribbons of Steak Tartar  
Red, instead of Oceanic Blue.  
But you? You bare your  
White teeth, the smile  
Open to interpretation,  
Raising tattooed eyebrows,  
Making an A.I. customer  
Service face that is  
Perfection,  
Almost, but not quite,  
Patting my hand,  
All the while  
Plotting a consultation  
With Reddit,  
And a full dissection  
With members of  
The electronic friend chorus,  
All to confirm  
A she-dog diagnosis:  
I am unreasoning.  
Flowers are flowers,  
Every bouquet is much  
The same.

But you don't understand.  
You don't. I need orchids.  
These are the last blooms,  
Of my particular life,  
The one I own.  
I must have  
What is a part of me,  
Specific and chosen,  
With Oceanic Blue accents  
To Toss away,  
Into a blameless  
Crowd of my sisters.

Artwork titled  
"Here Comes the Bride"  
by Ellie Aldrich

Modelled by  
Onna Martinez (she/her)



Artwork titled  
"Wife Sentence"  
by Caitlin Morris



# A BRIEF EXPLORATION OF WEDDING TRADITIONS

By Kailah Peters

*Content warning: mentions of rape*

A father escorts his daughter down the aisle.

Weddings began as a systemic way for a man to guarantee his children were truly his biological offspring. Brides were bought like cattle, with the pure intent of producing children and caring for the home. A father would sell his daughter to her husband, walking her down the aisle to show an exchange of property. In the ceremonies of ancient Greece, a father swears, "I pledge my daughter for the purpose of producing legitimate offspring."

If a bride could not produce offspring, she could be returned to her father.

A bride takes her husband's last name.

Throughout the middle ages and most of the 19th century, England established Coverture as part of its common law. This set the legal precedent for a husband's dominance over his family and asserted that the bride's identity was to be enmeshed with his. She gave up her last name to symbolize the complete surrender of her possessions and self.

A husband carries his new bride across the threshold.

Men in ancient Rome would forcibly carry their new wives into their homes, mimicking The Rape of the Sabine Women. Often, entire villages would help carry the new bride into the bedroom. All the while, she fights and screams - sometimes to make a show of her reluctance to give up her virginity. Sometimes sincerely.

# JAPANESE WAR BRIDES

By Hiromi Yoshida

*Content warning: profanity*

“They’re Bringing Home Japanese Wives,”  
Smith & Worden warned the nation  
in the January 19, 1952 issue of the *Saturday  
Evening Post*.

This postwar shift in American demographics  
Was really the result of pornographics:  
Butterfly mamas with dumpling tits  
Bodacious geishas with pidgin toes  
Godzilla girls with bazooka eyes  
Kimono dolls with slanty panties  
*Pan-Pan* gals with red-lacquered lipstick  
Origami schoolgirls with pleated skirts  
Hello Kitty virgins with cherry blossom nipples;  
America’s orientalist dream factories  
Operated overtime beyond the vested reaches—  
Of national interest.

So, let’s dream of long and happy days—  
Of happy housewives smiling in gingham dresses,  
and white pinafore aprons  
And Norman Rockwell girls with Raggedy Anns  
and Mary Janes  
And Wonder Bread boys with chocolate chip  
freckles peering over—  
    whitewashed fences:  
At the milkman and the Tin Man  
The Candy Man and the bandy man  
The Pillsbury Doughboy and the dingleberry  
snowboy  
And Chef Boyardee with the big fat spaghetti-O’s  
And Mister Clean with the hoop earring  
And Mrs. Jones with the curling pin  
And Sally with the tinsel tutu  
And the Green Giant with the beanstalk sprout-  
ing—  
    from Jack’s cracked flowering beanpot head.

After all, these Japanese women

Threaten to contaminate the gene pools  
Of American wonderland.  
Our big beneficent boisterous land  
Of big beefy cattle and big steel mills  
And speckled eggs and golden apples  
And endless milkyways  
And running creeks and dappled trout  
And waves of corn and wheat and barley  
And the Rocky Mountain range of sky and stars and  
multi-tiered shelves of rock  
formation and eagles  
    swooping—  
        down giddy heights  
        into purple canyons of    endless haze

This great land of Sunkist earth and star-spangled sky  
Will shrink and wilt and breed

A specious species  
Of diminutive yellow bonsai dwarfs  
Sprout black pubic hair  
And pigeon toes  
And mottled skin  
(Buck teeth  
Knock knees  
Cross eyes  
Small cock)

Not to mention—  
American squish cheese  
And cooties from  
    the Bogie Man lurking around  
    Johnny-come-lately’s house.

These Japanese brides can’t make coffee  
Cook Spam or mold Jell-O  
Bake loaves or roll meatballs  
Count teaspoons or measure ounces  
(Thanksgiving will be a Turkish disaster!)

They’ll burn your toast  
They’ll scorch your eggs  
They’ll crack your plates  
Bust your balls  
Break your heart  
And bleed you dry  
(Rice paddy leeches).

And yet, Hanako and Keiko and Teruko  
Say they were fed white lies  
Given blue-eyed injections  
With overloaded stun guns—  
And sour milk and rotten apples  
Thistledown and nettle sting  
Cactus flower and piney prickle  
Broken trinkets and tarnished rhinestone  
And a racist mother-in-law.  
For the sloppy Joes who bring home their Japanese brides,  
Grueling rice and sticky pudding  
Incompatible condiments cause indigestion  
A diarrhea for the nation  
And a pancreas pancake  
Of ulcerous gallstone  
And a jumping bean dance  
Of squinty tapeworm.

So what?  
If they’re bringing home Japanese wives  
Happy housewifery is knavery  
Tomfoolery and slavery,  
An importation of labor  
(Disguised as marriage)  
For suburban consumption  
And small-town talk.  
If Smith & Worden had informed the nation  
“They’re Bringing Home European Wives,”  
Readers would’ve demanded  
Tabloid news—  
Something weird and downright outrageous.

# JAPANESE WAR BRIDES CON'T.

European imports  
(brides included) are  
Part and parcel—no strings attached—  
Of laissez-faire  
And national trust  
And rising stocks  
And corporate estimates  
Of USCIS statistics  
And population growth  
To “Make America Great Again.”

In other words,  
The normal course  
Of labor migration  
In the Department of Reproduction  
(also known as Immigration)  
Is a Mayflower route  
Across stormy seas—  
A maiden voyage  
Into the unknown—  
Howling Injun deserts  
Of our brave New World  
Of black-eyed-susans  
And pilloried dreams  
Rather than  
A Silk Road trail  
Stealing across Pacific seas  
With suspect cargo  
And cryptic bills of lading:  
Bales of rice  
And chicken cages  
And berry-berry and weevils  
And chinamen  
With lopsided pigtailed,  
All replete with eunuch smiles.

Despite these histories  
Of transatlantic victory  
And transpacific duplicity  
What is the big deal  
About Japanese women  
And their eternal mystique—  
An orientalist construct, and  
A pulpy fantasy narrative?

Japanese war brides  
Remain with us  
A legacy of immaculate survival  
Beneath the skies of suture  
And nirvana light—  
Bleaching a cremation  
Of fire and marrow—  
The phoenix forever rising  
From Hiroshima ash.

Artwork titled “from the blackout  
series (summer bride)”

by Jane Waggoner Deschner

## ARTIST STATEMENT

I have a deep fascination with early and mid-twentieth-century vernacular photographs. Nan Goldin wrote, “The snapshot (is) the form of photography that is most defined by love. People take them out of love, and they take them to remember—people, places, and times. They’re about creating a history by recording a history.” When I collaborate with another’s photo, I tease out a common humanity not confined by time, place, or circumstance. I explore our shared human condition to better understand my own.



*Hartness State Airport, Springfield, Vermont*

When her father walks her up the grass aisle, it is as if a tow line snaps:

The bride spins upward. She sees the sun-tanned shoulders of bridesmaids who seem to stand in salute. Groom, wanting to follow, anchored by anxiety and black leather shoes.

Ring-bearer, in his miniature-man suit, runs for a better look. Flower girl's freshly washed curls lean back as she squints into sky. Mouths of matriarchs fall open. No sound

but state flag whips, rope-lock clangs. In the chrome of a nearby motorcycle, a silk satellite ascends. Who can tell cloud from veil as she flashes white and gray-vanishes?

We watch her as museum-goers gaze at a Chagall lover mid-air as she blissfully arabesques in updrafts, weekend gliders avoiding her pearl-seeded train.

We ancient married know: She must come down, silks blowing like Winged Victory, she will tell her love formulas of physics not addressed in the cleric's red book.

Warn him now: Having tasted weightlessness, she'll always pull upward like a tethered airship, both hands reaching for his, saying, *Let's explore the Elliptic.*

Originally published in *Face Painting in the Dark* (Dos Madres Press, 2014)

### ARTIST STATEMENT

My art translates a very retrograde cultural behavior. The piece is an exaggerated representation of the darkness that hovers over a bride-to-be as her marriage is molded by the outdated hands of misogyny, sexism, and patriarchy.

Artwork titled "Damaged Ever After"  
by Andrezza Pereira do Nascimento



# PRESSURE MAKES A DIAMOND RING

By Morgan Kail-Ackerman

From familial stress, societal musts, and critical self-pressure, women are compelled to get married. In American society, there is an expectation about what women's life is supposed to look like, a predetermined timeline they must follow. Women have to find "the one", settle down, get married, buy a house, have children, and live happily ever after. But sometimes life doesn't happen like that.

Despite the reality that women don't have to follow this timeline, there is so much pressure to have this "traditional" life. Parents pressure their daughters because "we want grandkids someday". Grandparents pressure their granddaughters because "we won't be here forever". Friends pressure each other because "everyone else is doing it". But more than anything, there is personal pressure. Some women want to have the "normal" life and are pressured into settling or rushing into a relationship because they will never have the time for marriage or kids.

All these pressures are made worse with capitalism. Marketing and advertisers in the wedding industry, a \$53 billion business, prey on these pressures. They are aware of women's insecurities and choose to exploit those societal wants. It is one of the reasons why people spend so much money on one wedding day.

The average cost for a wedding in the United States is \$35,329, according to The Knot, and this number doesn't include a honeymoon, a bachelor or bachelorette party, engagement party, or proposal. The price of weddings is atrocious. But women shouldn't be forced into these costs. If she wants a wedding, she shouldn't be pressured into what she should want or what she isn't buying. Marriage should be about celebrating love, not about spending money.

But this is what capitalist America created- another monster that devours love and respect and turns it into greed and cold-hard cash. Weddings didn't used to be so expensive. Wedding dresses weren't traditionally white

until 1840. Before the 1930s, proposals didn't require a ring. Wedding receptions weren't popular until the 1950s. The wedding industry keeps devouring, ruining the love-centric idea of a wedding. Capitalism exploits the societal pressure for profit, creating wedding registries, professional vow writing services, receptions, and wedding planning services. Women are pressured by society to follow these traditions, but these traditions make them pay.

Being a bride should be a happy occasion. The history of weddings is not always positive, with brides being sold like property from one man to another. But the beauty of our modern society is that women can take traditions and make them their own. People can make their weddings what they want. But weddings should not be another way for capitalism to exploit the societal pressures already stressing women out. America needs to remember what weddings are really about: love.

## ARTIST STATEMENT

This photograph is a still from *Naomi & The Reckoning*, an experimental film that follows Naomi, a young woman with a physical deformity. Struggling with body acceptance all her life, purity culture further complicated her relationship with her body. Now recently married, she can't find sexual satisfaction. Based upon the novelette from *Finishing Line Press*, authored by writer/director Christine Stoddard.

Artwork titled "Naomi & The Reckoning"  
by Christine Stoddard

# WEDDING NIGHT

By Marianne Peel

Artwork titled “Gulabo”  
by Bina Patel

I remember my fiancé digging tweezers out of my make-up bag, telling me I needed to pluck the grey hairs out of his beard the night before the wedding. I tell him to shave the whole thing off. That there are too many wizened hairs to pluck. That his cheeks and chin and upper lip would be patchy bald if I yanked out all the gray hairs.

I don't remember if my mother wove the daisies through my updo. Nor do I remember walking down the aisle with my father. There were Renaissance crum horns instead of the Celtic dance. A cassette tape malfunction. And I don't remember promising anything. Just his lips moving. Soundless. A broken front tooth. I smelled like a meadow of daisies. I wore ballet slippers to hide my height. As a girl, my mother kept reminding me not to slouch. Stand up straight, she would say, as she yanked my shoulders backward.

I don't remember dancing to the Chicken Dance. But there was a polka and I danced it with my Ukrainian girlfriend. She smelled of halushki and pierogi. I don't remember the call for last round. But my mother tied an embroidered apron to her waist and collected money for the Dollar Dance. One dollar for swaying. Five dollars for a waltz. Ten for the jitterbug. Twenty for the fox trot.

The wedding party went to a dive bar after the reception. There was the smell of bourbon and a stranger's breathing on my neck. He put both hands on my wedding dress bustle. Told me I was a pretty little filly. Said he was dang jealous of the man who got to ride me tonight. Called his buddies over. They jerked off my veil. My bouquet was filled with wrinkled and sweaty dollar bills. My dress smelled like unfiltered Camels.

I don't remember closing down the bar.

There were three men surrounding the car in the parking lot. One was vomiting onto the windshield. Another was zipping up his fly. Another was tying a string of Budweiser cans to the bumper. They sang “Going to the Chapel” as they slung their arms around each other's shoulders. Swaying.

The night vapors smelled like bourbon.  
They told me they didn't want the party to end.





Artwork titled “Contemplating  
the Future”

by Megan Berg

# A FAVORED WIFE

By Mary Lindberg

*Gold wreath of laurel leaves, 4th c. BC.  
National History Museum, Sofia, Bulgaria*

To assure a prosperous afterlife,  
Thracian rulers were buried with horses,  
servants, a favored wife. Was the chosen  
spouse grateful for the honor?

Inside a Bulgarian grave mound\* painted two  
thousand years ago, a king is celebrated in the afterlife.  
On the round ceiling brightly-colored frescoed  
warriors, horses, musicians, gift-bearers,  
as if on an eternal carousel, circle to a royal banquet.

The monarch, seated in a large chair, is crowned  
in bright, beaten gold. Next to him, his young  
queen wears a gold tiara. Her head bent, she slumps  
in her royal chair, looks down. Folds of her gown  
cascade mysteriously, like layers of inner conflict.

She leans forward, eyes cast on the world below.  
One arm holds her husband's, but her other hand  
touches her face pensively. She refuses the king's offer  
of food. What can she be thinking? Or feeling?

She will never again see her children,  
friends, parents. Or lover, if she has one.  
Like the horses pulling chariots round  
and round the ceiling, she has no choice.

Does she fear a sundial of eternity  
will shadow her, expose how the honor  
of mutual burial hoisted yet another  
heavy burden on her shoulders?

Tell me, gentle lady. Will we ever know  
why you look away forever  
from his gallant gaze  
wreathed in golden light?

\*Thracian tomb near Kazanlak, Bulgaria

# AN OGRE'S TALE

By Elisabeth Kramer

“What do you do for a living?” the Uber driver asked. It was after midnight on a Saturday night and I was an unaccompanied young woman. I suppose, in his eyes, my options were limited.

I highly doubted he'd guess correctly — my job was kind of uncommon — but I had no interest in talking. I'd just spent the whole day on my feet. What I wanted was a snack, a shower, and 10 hours of sleep. But the phone on the dashboard told me we were still a long way from home so I took a deep breath and replied.

“I'm a wedding planner.”

The driver's eyes caught mine in the mirror, and I braced for impact. The knowing gleam told me exactly what would come next because it's what almost always comes next when I tell people what I do for a living.

“You must work with a lot of bridezillas.”

What people have in mind when they tell me this, I couldn't tell you. Skyscraper-sized women in white dresses, smothering innocent passersby with their monstrous veils? Radioactive sea lizards wearing lipstick? Mascara-stained women screaming and crying on an antiquated TV show?

I hate to disappoint but the truth isn't nearly so cinematic. But tonight I had no interest in explaining as much. Instead, I replied “No, not really” before turning my entire body toward the back window. There were no follow-up questions.

Ironically, this man was driving me back from a wedding where I'd worked for an asshole. I'll call her Fiona, which is not her real name but one I like because it reminds me of Cameron Diaz' ogre in *Shrek* who's a princess by day, a monster by night.

My Fiona didn't care when the sun set; she was a nightmare no matter the hour. She sniped in the morning when I delivered pastries to her room, took to her bed in the mid-afternoon when her mom brought the wrong veil, and spent one memorable evening yelling at me over a mistake she had made.

It would be most satisfying if I stopped it all here. We have our villain

and also our hero. Fiona, bad. Beth, good. But alas, there is more to this tale and it will leave you with more questions than answers.

Because here's the thing about Fiona: People really liked her. During the reception, I couldn't stop guests from grabbing the mic and giving impromptu toasts about how amazing she was as a person. I'd never seen anything like it.

I expected such lip service from relatives or close friends, but these people were practically strangers. They had very little to gain from telling 200 people about the time that Fiona gave them a place to stay when they needed it or taught them to cook when they were homesick or spent countless hours doing any number of other saintly activities.

As person after person queued for the mic, I stood at the back of the room, stunned. Was this really the same woman whose texts made me break out in a cold sweat? Who had made me afraid to open my own inbox? Who is, to this day after five years of business, the only client who has ever yelled at me?

Yes, it was.

I don't say this to excuse Fiona's behavior. How she treated me was unacceptable, but she didn't act that way because she was a woman planning a wedding. She acted that way because she was a person who had been put under an enormous amount of stress.

Fiona got engaged and suddenly found herself the project manager of an event that, at last count, cost an average of \$33,931 and 10 hours a week to pull off. She didn't ask for the responsibility; the world thrust it upon her. If she pushed back, she was punished with “You're just getting cold feet” or “But it's your wedding! Don't you want it to be the best day of your life?”

So of course, she turned into a monster. Under such strain, it isn't an abnormal condition. It's a defense mechanism.

These days, when people ask what I do for a living and I see that familiar gleam in their eyes, I don't turn away. I tell them about Fiona. I explain how she was the closest I've ever come to a textbook “bridezilla,” and how she was also the person who taught me that the word is nothing more than another slur we call women who aren't what we think they should be.

## OUR TEAM



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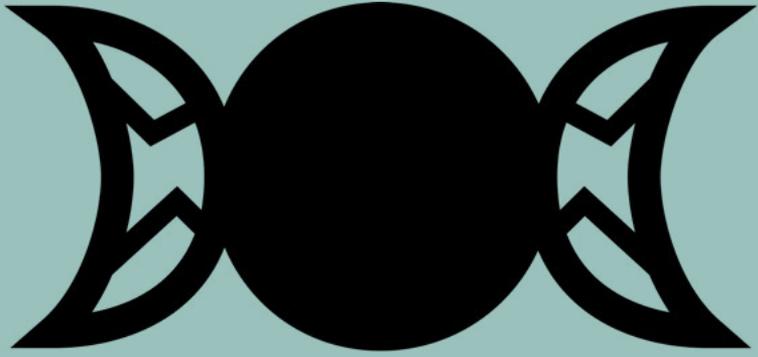


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## OUR PATREON

They Call Us is a not-for-profit organization. To fund our magazine, we've created a Patreon page and a merch shop. By donating through Patreon you will receive exclusive invites to coven congress, Patreon only merch, sneak peeks into upcoming editions, and access to a feminist only discord group. Please consider donating on our Patreon, [www.patreon.com/theycallus](http://www.patreon.com/theycallus), purchasing merch online, [www.theycallus.com/shop](http://www.theycallus.com/shop), or just sharing this magazine with friends.

They Call Us is a passion project for our team members and, although we do not make any money through the zine, it helps our organization to host events, donate to other feminist causes, and support our contributing writers and artists.



# THEY CALL US

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If you're interested in submitting work for our next edition, please email us at [theycalluszine@gmail.com](mailto:theycalluszine@gmail.com) or visit our website at [theycallus.com](http://theycallus.com).

Thank you for reading!